DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 543 FL 020 331

AUTHOR Sell, John W.; And Others
TITLE Commercial Language, Business Economics, and the Liberal Arts Curriculum.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (10th, Ypsilanti, MI, April 3-5, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Aids; Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; *College Second Language Programs; *Cultural Awareness; Curriculum Development; Economics; European History; Faculty Development; French; Higher Education; *International Trade; Internship Programs; *Languages for Special Purposes; Language Teachers; *Liberal Arts; Library Collection Development; Program Descriptions; Second Language Instruction; Spanish
IDENTIFIERS *College of Wooster OH

ABSTRACT

A program at the College of Wooster (Ohio) in commercial language and international business is described. The program was undertaken with private funds and within the context of a traditional liberal arts college. It has three main curricular goals: (1) additional training of language instructors for language courses that would include the language of technology, business, and commerce; (2) modifications of existing foreign culture courses; and (3) upgrading of library and audio-visual resources to support international business-related courses and senior theses. While the goals are common to most international business programs, this program has several unique characteristics. It: uses private funds only; takes advantage of the adaptability inherent in the liberal arts setting; and is administered entirely by program participants, not college administrators. In the Spanish department, a full course in Spanish for commercial use is offered. The French department includes a course on the French economy since 1945 and one on business French. The German department offers a team-taught economics course in German. In addition, an internship program for the college, with business contacts in France and Germany, is in development. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED345543

Commercial Language, Business Economics, and the Liberal Arts Curriculum

John W. Sell , Diane Ringer Uber, David Wilkin, Horst Kurz, and Nicholas Schalk

Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (10th, Ypsilanti, MI, April 3-5, 1991).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Geoffrey Voght

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 020 331

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Commercial Language, Business Economics and the Liberal Arts Curriculum

by John W. Sell, Diane Ringer Uber, David Wilkin, Horst Kurz, and Nicholas Schalk*

For years, liberal arts institutions have been asserting the advantages of liberal learning with respect to a student's ability to solve problems in creative ways and in unfamiliar settings and to communicate the results effectively. Only recently, however, have the same institutions recognized that international business is a setting where these skills count heavily. For the few Colleges that have recognized the harmonious potential of business and the liberal arts, a significant potential exists.

The College of Wooster has implemented a commercial language and international business program with the support of private grant funds and within the context of a traditional liberal arts setting. The original proposal for this program stated three main curricular goals: 1) additional training of language instructors to teach language courses which would include attention to the language of technology, business, and commerce, 2) modifications of existing foreign culture courses and 3) the upgrading of library and audio-visual resources to support international business-related courses and senior theses.

These goals are probably common to most international business programs, but our implementation is unique in several respects: the program has been undertaken exclusively with private funds; it takes advantage of the "customizing" ability of a liberal arts setting; and it is administered entirely by the program participants without administrative interference. A member of the Business Economics department who has an avocational interest in the German language coordinates the program and administers the grant funds. These aspects are highlighted in the discussion that follows.

Background

Fueled by the declining demographic slope, increasing competition for students, and the continuing popularity of business as a field of study, many traditional liberal arts colleges are taking a second look at business as an academic field of study. The course offerings in most departments of a liberal arts institution do not differ dramatically from their university counterparts. Yet, there are important differences in emphasis. It is probably fair to say that modern liberal arts curricula share common concerns for multi-disciplinary approaches to problem-solving, a high tolerance for flexibility and innovation, and a concern about the social implications of decision-making. At Wooster, we also have a junior and senior thesis requirement which reflects a traditional liberal arts interest in writing and research skills.

It is these concerns that also make liberal arts faculty rightly skeptical of formal business training that emphasizes simple answers to complex questions. Yet, this understanding should also act to support the study of business in a liberal arts setting. If rapidly changing economic conditions and increasing competitiveness in the international economy mean that old business answers don't work, then this is precisely a setting in which liberal arts graduates should shine. There is evidence that students understand both sides of this issue as the presentation by our student panelist shows in his focus on the decision-making *process* and his description of a "duality of interests."

---

* Associate Professor of Business Economics, Assistant Professor of Spanish, Professor of French, Instructor of German, and Student respectively at the College of Wooster, Wooster, OH 44691.

Realistically, however, one must also deal with the resistance of many liberal arts educators to things that are practical. The institution where we teach emphasizes this in the course catalog by quoting a former College president who, in 1915, said proudly that Wooster graduates "should be quite good for nothing (in particular)." Such attitudes mean that we as educators must also be innovative in attracting and motivating scholars who are willing to apply their cultural and literary insights to a business setting. The way we do this is described below in the discussion of how language culture courses have been adapted to a commercial focus. This is followed by an example of an economics course that has done the reverse.

Curriculum

The French and Spanish Departments have, in place, courses which specifically address business and commercial culture. Rather than introduce new courses, these Departments have chosen to teach, on a regular basis, culture courses with commercial rather than the usual literary emphasis. Commercial German has been handled differently. Each of these courses is discussed below in turn.

Spanish

The Department of Spanish offers a full course in Spanish for Commercial Use. During the preparatory phase, the instructor attended the Ninth EMU Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (April 1990), and workshops on International Business and Teaching Spanish for International Business at the University of South Carolina.

The course deals with business vocabulary, commercial practices in Spanish-speaking countries, recent economic developments in the Spanish-speaking world, and the acquisition of general linguistic and cultural proficiency essential to conducting business successfully in Spanish. The course attempts to match the real world demands to which students will later be able to take their newly-tailored language skills, a world where the communicative flow should be smooth, precise, quick, and accurate under pressure.

Classroom activities include a series of videotapes (España y América: ¡Al habla!), which presents the store of a Mexican executive who travels to Spain to work out a business deal. The series emphasizes cultural information and the personal skills necessary for conducting business transactions in Spanish-speaking areas. To reinforce this, each student prepared a report on a country or related group of countries using a geographical, cultural, and economic focus. Maps are used noting cultural differences within the country and other countries. The student is expected to know the exchange rate for the country's currency with respect to the United States dollar, as well as the overall economic status of the country, its principal products, firms, and industries.

Skits and role-playing are also employed in the course, giving students the opportunity to apply their new vocabulary and commercial knowledge. One of the most useful of these is the preparation of a cover letter and resumé for a job in a Spanish-speaking firm. This was followed by an "interview" with the instructor who acted as the president of the company in a role play. Students find this to be helpful showing the competitiveness of interviewing combined with the experience of it being conducted in Spanish. We hope that this will also be useful in the internship part of our program described below.

The culmination of the course is a group term paper and oral presentation prepared by three to five students. The business world emphasized teamwork and common goals. This paper encourages students to practice the skills of cooperation and responsibility in a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

collective setting. Topics included: Spain, the Economic Community, and 1992; the impact of the drug trade on the Columbian economy; designing a marketing campaign geared toward an Hispanic community. One of the students is now writing Wooster's required senior thesis on a course-related topic.

French

The French Department offers two courses that relate to this program. One is titled, "The French Economy Since 1945" and discusses how ways of thinking, traditions, and social and political structures in France affect French economic life. The course emphasizes the types of economic activity, state and private roles in the economy, and companies and their structures. No single text is used. Instead, economic materials are obtained from current periodicals such as *L'Expansion* and *Le Nouvel Economiste*, both subscriptions purchased with grant funds. Students are required to select a research subject that culminates in a research paper at the end of the semester. One student, for example, chose to investigate government programs to combat unemployment among young people in France.

The second course offering stresses "Business French." The students purchased Jacques LeGoff's Business French text, but the primary resource for the course is the *Valise du français des affaires*. As in the Spanish course, students write letters, a resumé, and cover letter. We also do telephone exercises as preparation for the job application process with Darty's, a large chain of home appliance outlets in France. There are oral "interviews" with the instructor or language assistant.

Grant funds have been used to support attendance at several seminars in preparation for teaching these courses. One was a three-week seminar on the French economy, *Initiation à la vie des affaires en France*, organized by the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Lyon. A second set of seminars was given by the Chambre de Commerce de Paris and focussed on the European Community.

In both of these courses, we encourage students to consider the *Certificat pratique du français des affaires* offered by the Paris Chamber of Commerce. The material also serves as the basis for senior thesis projects. A recent project was co-supervised by the French and Business Departments and examined whether American stereotypes of the French have an effect on the commercial success of French companies in the United States. The topic underscores the interaction of language and business studies in a liberal arts setting.

Economics and Business

The preceding discussion reflects the ability of traditionally-trained linguists to cross over into more commercial spheres. Wooster's handling of commercial German represents flexibility in the opposite direction.

The staff of the German Department is smaller than the French and Spanish Departments and have professional interests along more traditional linguistic lines. In the face of the overall strength of the German economy and the economic opportunities attendant to the unification of Germany, this presented a real challenge for our curriculum. The solution was to offer a team-taught economics course in the German language.

Most of the vocabulary found in the commercial French and Spanish courses is also part of a standard Principles of Economics course. There are at least two ways in which the courses differ, however. First, students who are interested in commercial German usually have a background that is less technical than the typical economics or business ma-

jor. Second, the course must bear sufficient resemblance to a standard principles course that economics credit can be given for it.

The first problem is solved by the choice of the text for the course. We use Paul Heyne's Economic Way of Thinking which stresses economic thinking and concepts rather than graphics and mathematics. The text is written in English and is sufficiently accessible that students can read and, for the most part, understand it on their own. Class sessions, on the other hand, are exclusively in German, the beginning of each class period being devoted to translating into German the important economic concepts from the assigned readings. The use of the German terminology during the class session reinforces the reading and shows that the same analysis can be conducted in the foreign language. Standard principles of economics problem sets have also been translated into German and are used for homework assignments. The examinations are translations of the end-of-chapter essay problems from the assigned readings and some additional multiple choice questions that do not require a written response.

In the translation of the written assignments and during the class sessions, a member of the German Department acts as a language consultant. This is necessary, because the course offers economics credit and, therefore, must be taught by an economist. The course is taught at Wooster by a member of the Economics Department who has an avocational interest in German. Grant funds have been used to allow him to study at the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft in Cologne to enhance language skills originally acquired as a student. This training, along with a member of the German Department in the classroom, ensures the linguistic integrity of the course. For the translation of technical terms we use *Der Grosse Eichborn* as a dictionary resource and *Volkswirtschaftslehre* by Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus which is a direct translation of their standard text Economics (12th edition).

A secondary goal of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to sit for the *Wirtschaftsdeutschprüfung International*, as a certification of their language ability. This is consistent with the internship component of our program to which we now turn.

Internships

For twenty years, Wooster has offered internships allowing students to apply their course work in a practical setting. Our commercial language program seeks to expand this to an international context. This part of the program is still in a formative stage. Grant funds have been used to make business contacts for the College in France and Germany. We also work through other programs such as the Institute for European Studies and the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft. Foreign firms have been willing to consider our students, especially if they have computer skills. To date, two students have been placed in internships as part of this program. One was placed with the Chambre de Commerce de Nantes. She had the opportunity to work in a number of positions within the Chamber. A second held a banking internship in Dijon. In both cases, the internships were of shorter duration than our domestic alternatives. We are presently working to develop more contacts in the hopes of encouraging a longer-term placement.